

Amendments to the Abstract:***Please amend the Abstract as follows:***

A variety of embodiments of a variable incision width guide-wire steered scalpel are disclosed. Each embodiment employs a split blade which is proximally hinged, thereby facilitating making a variable width incision of a predetermined, substantially constant depth. Methods of preselecting an incision width are disclosed. Also, a plurality of embodiments of such a scalpel which may be used to provide an incision of preselected depth, as well, are disclosed. Notably, once a depth has been predetermined, that depth is kept substantially constant over the width of a resulting incision. While a wire may be threaded through the scalpel as a guide, the scalpel may be used for other incision applications without a guide-wire. ~~The scalpel has safety features which generally follow the steps of piercing to make an incision of predetermined depth, transversely opening the split blade to widen the incision to a predetermined width, closing split blade and retracting the blade into a protective housing. In some embodiments, the retracting step precedes the closing step.~~